



LEGISLATIVE CONCEPTS: RECREATION ENHANCEMENT, WILDFIRE RESILIENCY, AND CONSERVATION FOR MT. HOOD AND THE COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE

OREGONIANS SHARE THEIR PRIORITIES FOR MT. HOOD AND THE COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE

Over the last several years, Congressman Blumenauer and Senator Wyden have listened to feedback from Oregonians, Tribal sovereigns, local elected officials, businesses, and others about Mt. Hood and the Columbia River Gorge. These stakeholders have shared information about how they use these special places, their concerns, and their proposed solutions to improve management, address wildfire risk, enhance recreation, and protect natural resources. After hearing from the public, the Congressman has compiled a series of legislative concepts designed to improve access to Mt. Hood and the Gorge for consideration in this public comment period. He welcomes your feedback as he and Senator Wyden continue to work together to protect and enhance our state's natural treasures.

PUBLIC PROCESS

For years now, Congressman Blumenauer and Senator Wyden have met with many individuals, elected officials, organizations, and local governments to better understand their ideas and concerns about Mt. Hood and the Gorge. They convened two public forums to gather feedback (March 2019 and August 2019). They held a public comment period during summer 2019 to solicit information, ideas, and concerns regarding these special places. During 2020 and 2021 they gathered additional feedback, ideas, and questions from a wide array of stakeholders, and put together draft concepts. The December 2021 comment period is another opportunity for the public to weigh in and help shape these ideas before legislation is drafted.

KEY THEMES

The public is interested in enhancing **sustainable and equitable outdoor recreation** on Mt. Hood and in the Gorge. During the coronavirus pandemic, these already-popular areas have seen skyrocketing use as people seek safe opportunities for outdoor recreation. The pandemic has underscored the need for relief at crowded trailheads, dispersal of use through better maintenance of existing trails and infrastructure and investment in new, sustainable recreational opportunities, and rehabilitation of wildfire-damaged infrastructure and increased fire resiliency, while ensuring that everyone feels welcomed when recreating here.

Oregonians also want to **protect the natural features that make these places so special**. With the outdoors providing a much-needed escape, people feel it's important now more than ever to preserve the canyons, ridges, and rivers where they hike, hunt and fish, bike, camp, ski, and ride. From pockets of old growth to stunning rivers and beautiful lakes, the Mt. Hood National Forest has many important resources to protect – for unparalleled recreation, for their wild character, to improve habitat for wildlife, to protect clean water and clean air, and to sequester carbon in the face of climate change.

Given the reality of climate change, we are likely to experience more frequent and intense storm and wildfire events on public lands. It's critical that as Congress seeks to enhance outdoor recreation



opportunities and conserve special places, it must **prioritize protecting communities at risk of wildfire damage**. Given the recent wildfire seasons and the increasing severity of catastrophic wildfire, there is considerable demand for plans and forest treatments to mitigate wildfire risk, and to invest in forest health across the landscape.

Imperative in managing public lands is respect for tribal communities who have lived on and stewarded the land since time immemorial. Future legislation addressing unmet needs on Mt. Hood must ensure that the federal government honors its treaty obligations and trust responsibilities to tribes by creating new management requirements to **ensure that tribal treaty rights are honored, prioritized, and protected**.

There's also significant interest in **modernizing transportation and transit systems** on Mt. Hood and in the Gorge. Local residents, employees, and visitors alike must get to and from these places safely and efficiently, while reducing car trips and greenhouse gas emissions.

DRAFT LEGISLATIVE CONCEPTS

Updating Mount Hood National Recreation Area.

By updating and expanding the existing National Recreation Area on the mountain, outdoor recreation opportunities and management could be enhanced, creating a better user experience while renewing a focus on wildfire resiliency, equity, and environmental stewardship. This concept could:

- Help the U.S. Forest Service prioritize equitable access to a diversity of high-quality outdoor recreation opportunities, reducing congestion on roadways and at crowded trailheads, and ensuring public safety and fire resilience, while protecting the ecological and scenic character of the area.
- Require a management plan to focus on enhancing, among other things:
 - Planning, protection, and management of structures for wildfire risk,
 - Investment in fire resiliency to protect communities and treasured places,
 - Trail stewardship and recreation management,
 - Transportation planning and management,
 - Big game and native species,
 - Natural, healthy forest stands and carbon storage, and
 - A variety of outdoor recreation experiences to serve diverse users.

Wildfire planning, mitigation, and rehabilitation.

Creating a wildfire planning, rehabilitation, and restoration plan for areas within the Mount Hood National Forest could help the Forest Service prioritize management activities that mitigate wildfire risk to communities. This concept could include:

- An assessment of wildfire risk across the Forest and creation of a mitigation and adaptation plan that identifies activities that can help protect communities, such as:
 - Science based, ecological fire mitigation treatments,
 - Evacuation routes and dissemination of emergency information, and
 - Prescribed fire and other wildfire risk management efforts.



- Prioritization of rebuilding and rehabilitation of recreation trails, boat launches, campgrounds, day-use areas, and other recreational infrastructure on the Forest for use by the public.

Enhancing trail stewardship on the Mount Hood National Forest.

Enhancing stewardship work on the Mount Hood National Forest could help ensure an ecologically and socially sustainable recreation trail network through the assistance of cooperating partners who are ready and willing to help. In other words, open more trails for more users, using better-coordinated volunteers. This concept could include:

- Creation of a recreation trails collaborative,
- Modernization of equipment to safely and effectively manage trail stewardship volunteers,
- Hiring more staff to manage recreation and partnership coordination,
- Identifying and meaningfully addressing recreation and stewardship issues concerning disadvantaged communities, and
- Exploring collaborative technology platforms to facilitate communication among volunteers.

Recreation enhancement for the Pacific Crest Trail.

Special management direction for land along the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail on the Mount Hood National Forest could help preserve the trail's recreational, scenic, and other qualities. This concept could include help ensure that certain newly-proposed activities take the location of the Trail into account and, where practicable, minimize impacts to the Trail itself, without affecting reserved or outstanding rights provided by statute or treaty; the use and maintenance of existing roads, trails, highways; permitted activities; and other activities for wildfire resiliency.

Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area trail planning and sustainability.

Enhancing recreation trail planning initiatives in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area can ensure a better, more sustainable and more enjoyable recreation experience for all. This concept could include:

- Development of a common vision for a socially, ecologically, and economically sustainable recreation trail system within the National Scenic Area,
- Assessing the existing trail network to align with current ecological, social, cultural, and recreational needs; and
- Conducting studies to explore recreation trail development initiatives such as a loop trail system around the National Scenic Area and other key connector trails.

Designation of new additions to the Mount Hood Wilderness.

Wilderness designation in appropriate places can help preserve habitat and protect clean water and clean air – but also provide a wild, solitary recreation experience for a variety of users. This concept could include protecting as Wilderness parts of the iconic Tamanawas Falls area, Mount Defiance, Bluegrass Ridge and the beloved Salmon River keyhole, among other areas.



Designation of new Wild and Scenic Rivers.

Designating new Wild and Scenic Rivers is an important tool for protecting and enhancing selected scenic, recreational, and wild waterways that provide clean drinking water, outstanding experiences for recreationists, and habitat for fish and wildlife. This concept could include protecting parts of key rivers such as Still Creek, the West Fork Hood River, and sections of the Sandy River and Zigzag River, among others.

Ensuring Tribal sovereignty and treaty rights are honored.

Imperative in managing public lands is respect for tribal communities who have lived on and stewarded the land since time immemorial. The federal government must honor and prioritize its legal and trust obligations to tribes, and protect tribal treaty rights. This concept could include:

- Assurance that the Mt. Hood National Forest follows through on its statutory obligations to the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs to develop a Cultural Foods Plan,
- Development of a management guideline to emphasize wildfire management, management of cultural foods, and habitat restore and enhancement for species such as deer and elk, and
- Regular training and workshops for Forest Service staff on tribal trust responsibilities.

Enhancing safe, reliable access to the Columbia River Gorge and Mount Hood.

Oregonians have called for better transportation management and safer access to the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area and Mount Hood National Forest. Initiating the creation of a comprehensive plan in the Gorge, and enhancing existing plans on Mount Hood could help ensure that a wide variety of users – from tourists and regular recreational visitors to residents, employees, and folks just passing through – enjoy safe, equitable, and ecologically sustainable access to these special places by:

- Providing coordinated, reliable, and user-friendly transportation and transit options,
- Reducing congestion and improving public safety and emergency access,
- Providing sustainable funding sources for search and rescue, traffic and recreation management, and maintenance and restoration activities,
- Determining the feasibility of new or enhanced rest areas for public use on Mount Hood,
- Ensuring transportation options are accessible to transit-dependent and low-income communities; and
- Ensuring public safety.

Enhancing public safety.

As more and more Oregonians and tourists flock to Mt. Hood, it's critical that public safety is protected and enhanced. Local jurisdictions, who are largely responsible for activities like search and rescue, as well as significant firefighting and law enforcement services, must be able to keep providing these vital services. This concept could include:

- Authorization of funding for additional law enforcement and search and rescue personnel on the Mt. Hood National Forest who have undergone rigorous diversity, equity, and inclusion training,
- Help for counties and other Oregon jurisdictions to be reimbursed by the Forest Service for providing critical public safety services, and
- Emphasis on public education and signage, particularly for popular recreation areas.